Impact of Stress : A Systematic Review

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Abstract

The systematic review in this study is looking at the causes of stress in the workplace. The authors will identify the most leading causes of work-related stress, as well as their impacts on employees' physical well-being, mental health and work performance. In addition, the stress factors arising from work environment or atmosphere, workplace relationships, organizational culture, career growth, role conflict, and work-life balance are highlighted. Finally, the authors discuss on several stress coping approaches, namely getting social support, attending stress coping or stress management programmes, upgrading work environment, and reforming organizational culture.

Keywords
Stress, Work-Related Stress, Stressors, Coping Strategies

1. Introduction

Stress is a regular state that happened to everyone. Numerous studies have been done by many researchers and experts in relation to stress, particularly stress which occurred in the workplace. According to Sengupta and Sengupta (2017), stress is defined as mental, emotional, and physical reactions to a difficult situation. Besides, stress is also described as a physical and mental condition which influences the individual's productivity, efficiency, health and work quality (Comish and Swindle, 1994).

In terms of stress occurred in the workplace, Colligan and Higgins (2006) stated that the workplace is the change in one's mental or physical state in response to workplaces that pose an appraised challenge or threat to that worker. Besides, Ramli (2016) stated that the pressure from one's workplace is a very critical phenomenon and is regularly associated with the employees' work performance, health and productivity levels. This kind of stress may threaten the person or the worker's quality working life. Stress may also vary according to the type of work, position or responsibility held by the worker (Ramli, 2016).

Different kind of work scope or type of job will definitely gives different stress levels. This is agreed by Lazarus (1991), whom mentioned that stress and also distress differ according to occasion or setting involved with the individuals. Furthermore, stress can also vary according to age, socio-economic variable, personality and job category (Lazarus, 1991). In this paper, a systematic review on the most leading causes of stress in the workplace will be identified. Then, the impact of stress and ways of coping with stress will also be discussed.

2. Related Theory

There are many theories on stress have been broadly discussed and mentioned by researchers. The stress physiological model, General Adaptation Syndrome Theory was introduced by Hans Selye (Bullare et al., 2009). The theory explains that stress is a human body's response towards the cause of stress. According to Berry (1998), few hormonal mechanisms and human body's nervous system are being continuously activated when the person

faces with stressful situation. Based on this theory, the stressed person will try to reduce his or her pressure by doing any challenging activities, or confronting and fighting back the pressure by himself or herself (Bullare et al., 2009).

There are three stages in this theory; the first one is general which means the cause of stress may leave an impact or effect on certain parts of the body. The second one is adaptation, which shows the stimulated defense that helps the body in controlling the causes of stress. The third one is syndrome, which refers to individuals whom experienced more or less pressure reactions in an organization.

A cognitive-motivational-relational theory related to stress has been mentioned by Lazarus (1991). In this theory, stress is depending on the power balance between environmental demand, constraint and resource, as well as the capability of the individual in managing them. Thus, it can be said that stress in the workplace is strongly linked with the stated factors or conditions.

Unlike theories discussed before this, the next theory is resource theories of stress which are not primarily concerned with factors that create stress, but with resources that preserve well being in the face of stressful encounters. Several social and personal constructs have been proposed, such as social support (Schwarzer and Leppin, 1991, sense of coherence (Antonovsky, 1979), hardiness (Kobasa, 1979), self-efficacy (Bandura, 1977) or optimism (Scheier and Carver, 1992). Among the several and personal construct proposed above showed that all of them were contributed in the stress increasing level among employees at the workplace.

3. Factors of Stress

There are several factors in causing stress especially to the employees in the workplace. Six categories of the factors of stress have been identified and focused, namely work environment, workplace relationships, organizational culture, career growth, and role conflict.

3.1 Work Environment

Elsbach and Pratt (2007) defined physical work environment as all material objects that employees interact with in their working lives. Some poor physical aspects in the workplace are including space, lighting, noise, vibration, confined spaces, and temperature. For instance, a very noisy working place or narrow spaces for the workers to work will cause them to become stress and give more difficulties for them to perform their job perfectly. This is similar to research done by Burke (1988) whom mentioned that physical conditions namely high noise levels, overcrowding in the workplace or a lack of privacy have been linked with stress.

A negative work environment may influence stress to the employees in an organization. For example, a person that works in a toxic work environment will constantly face fear and anxiety (Colligan and Higgins, 2006). On the other hand, a job with dangerous events is also very stressful, such as police work (He et al., 2002). This is because they are always exposed to negative aspects namely violent actions, shootings or funerals. Therefore, it can be said that an improved and comfortable work environment is a must in order to reduce the workplace stress.

3.2 Workplace Relationships

One of the most significant factors of stress in workplace is the relationship between employees as well as employers in the workplace. The problematic relationships may occur between coworkers, subordinates, administrators, or managers (Colligan and Higgins, 2006). Things may get worse if some additional stressors involving discrimination, harassment, bully and violence occurred among them.

Bullying activity is one of the phenomenons that may occur between individuals in the office. There are five categories of bullying behaviour as discussed by Rayner and Hoel (1997), which are: (1) threat to professional status such as public humiliation or mocking opinions; (2) threat to individual standing like insulting, name-calling or offensive teasing; (3) isolation such as limiting access to good opportunities or preserving information only to

themselves; (4) overwork such as unjustified pressure to perform task, unattainable deadlines, and pointless disruptions; and (5) destabilization like not giving credit, worthless tasks, elimination of responsibility, and changing of goalposts. These kinds of situations may definitely contribute to workplace stress among the employees.

3.3 Organizational Culture

Organizational culture is one of the key factors in determining how an organization will succeed in managing stress in the workplace. It is obviously seen that organizational culture is one of the central concepts which may have a bearing on the universal influence on the organizational commitment of the employees. Some of the aspects in organizational culture are including the attitudes of workers, their shared beliefs regarding the organization, shared value, and also common methods or ways in behaving at the workplace (Leka et al., 2003).

Other than that, organizational culture also focuses on how problems in the workplace are being recognized and solved. Some studies also disclosed that workplace stress revolves around several areas of organizational functions and culture, such as organization as task environment and development environment (Oke, 2008). Therefore, any organizational poor performance in these key areas could likely encourage increased the stress levels.

3.4 Career Growth

According to Colligan and Higgins (2006), this issue is related to promotion level, job security, and career development opportunities. Besides, Nekoranec and Kmosena (2015) mentioned that several aspects related to career growth is job insecurity or job security, desire for promotion, getting higher position in organization, moving to less attractive position and loss or lack of opportunities for professional career development.

When there is limited opportunity for the workers to stand out or advance themselves due to several conditions like changes in technology aspect or merging, employees are likely to face a risky situation in maintaining their jobs. This condition may cause stress to them.

3.5 Role Conflict

According to Burke (1988), role-based factors such as lack of power, role ambiguity, and role conflict have been related to the cause of stress. Role conflict can be defined as the simultaneous happening of two or more sets of pressures in the workplace (Kahn et al., 1964). Role conflict occurs when there is mutual incompatibility between work demands and other work aspects (Nekoranec and Kmosena, 2015).

In other words, an employee will face a role conflict situation when he or she is given different and clashing orders or works from the leaders. The uncertainty of the role may cause stress to the employee. For example, employees who are expected to execute creative and high quality task, but at the same time they have to deal with with the strict deadlines, often experience the role conflict.

3.6 Work-life Balance

An individual can maintain a work-life balance by adjusting his or her day-to-day activities in order to attain a sense of balance between working and private life. It is believed that by having work-life balance, the person can evade stress, mental exhaustion and burnout, which can negatively affects the ability to work efficiently.

In the research done by Shanafelt et al. (2012), stress or burnout is highly widespread among US physicians, rather than other type of workers. The findings show that the individuals whom work longer hours experience greater struggles in balancing their working and personal life. This situation gives a very great risk and stress to the workers

as they feel dissatisfied and exhausted with their daily life. Therefore, it is very crucial to take some interventions, so that this issue can be addressed.

4. Impacts of Stress

From these addressed factors, undoubtly several impacts are seriously affected the employees in performing their daily tasks. The employees whom consistently experience stress while working may have some impacts in several aspects:

4.1 Health Impact

According to Colligan and Higgins (2006), employees experiencing persistent work stress will most likely to develop some of unhealthy symptoms. For example, the employees could face unstable blood pressure, hypertension, increased cholesterol levels, muscle tension, diabetes, headaches, substance abuse, and clinical depression (Colligan and Higgins, 2006).

This is similar to the findings by Costa (1996), where approximately 20 percent of night shift workers have to quit their jobs because of some health problems such as chronic fatigue, hypertension, heart disease, and gastrointestinal dysfunction. Other impacts of stress that could provide linkages to health have been recognized, particularly increases in accidents, smoking, sleep problems, substance use, and eating disorders.

4.2 Psychological Impact

Moreover, Colligan and Higgins (2006) mentioned that the psychological impact of workplace stress include depression, persistent anxiety, pessimism, and resentment. Besides, the employee also may experience the feelings of anxiety, anger, and irritability (Israel et al., 1989). These conditions may influence his or her ability to maintain interpersonal relationships inside or outside of the organization.

In addition, the psychological impact may occur when the person faces with poor physical work environment (Shea et al., 2011). For example, poor light quality and absence of windows in the workplace may lead to an increased occurrence of depression. Besides, the diagnosis of a major medical illness frequently has been considered a cruel life stressor with rapid depression levels (Cassem, 1995).

4.3 Behavioural Impact

The impact of these symptoms on organizations is significant as these symptoms lead to hostility in the workplace, low morale, interpersonal conflict, increased benefit expenses, decreased productivity, and increased absenteeism. Because of these symptoms, the workers may show off their negative behaviours during work by not doing his or her job properly and other agitated and uncontrolled behaviours. This can be one of the ways for them to protest whatever happened to them in front of their employers.

According to Kessing et al. (2003), a study of Denmark patients found that several issues such as divorces, unemployment, and suicides occurred due to life and workplace stress. These severe issues give signal that such negative behavioural impacts are very harmful and need to be taken into consideration. Other than that, some people experience personality changes in response to stress hormones, which are part of their internal environment.

6. Coping with Stress

According to Lazarus (1991), there are three strategies that can be taken in handling and reducing stress at the workplace. The strategies are related to the managers' important role as the leader in the company or department. The first one is the managers need to adjust the working conditions to be more conducive and comfortable. This can be done by eliminating obstacles like overloaded tasks, environmental irritations, and isolation. The second strategy is to assist the employees in improving their environment condition, by giving them an employee support program or stress management resources. Furthermore, the next strategy is to identify and help them by constructing some solutions in removing the tension in their stressful condition or relationship. From these strategies, it can be seen that the role of managers or leaders are very critical in maintaining a healthy or stress-free environment in the workplace.

Other than that, Burke (1993) discussed on the coping strategies in reducing stress, which typically involve getting family and social support. For instance, the person can take few strategies namely attending support group meetings, sharing stressful incidents with other people, and also participating in religious-based support groups.

6. Conclusion

Stress in the workplace is a very critical issue and a real challenge to the employees as well as the employers. Therefore, it is essential that every party in the workplace, be it employer or employees, cooperates with each other in managing the stress in the workplace. For instance, some stress coping strategies that can be used are getting social support, attending stress coping or stress management programmes, upgrading work environment, and reforming organizational culture.

In addition, it is essential that the workplace is being continuously monitored so that the stress problems will not spreading or expanding to a broader and more harmful ones. A healthy working place and stress-free environment need to be promoted, while managers play a significant role in the identifying and finding ways to intervene the unceasing workplace stress.

Acknowledgements

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